

Steps to a Healthier Diet

1 Avoid cheese, cut back, or switch to low-fat.

Why change?

Cheese is one of the top three sources of artery-clogging saturated fat in the average American's diet. (The other two: beef and milk.) It wasn't always that way. From 1970 to 1994, we more than doubled our cheese intake, from 11 to 27 pounds per person per year. That's over half a pound (8 oz.) a week. The biggest jump: mozzarella, the pizza cheese.

Each ounce of full-fat cheese has four to six grams of saturated fat. And an ounce is just 1 1/3 slices of American, 1/4 cup of shredded, or a 1 and half inch cube of hard cheese. It's about what you'd get in one slice of a medium pizza.

If you're a typical cheese eater and you cut back to two ounces a week, you'll save almost five grams of sat fat a day. Not bad.



How to do it

- Order your sandwiches, burgers, salads, etc., without cheese.
- Order your pizza with half the cheese (and try mushrooms, onions, or other veggies instead of meat).
- If you don't like the taste of fat-free cheeses, try a reduced-fat brand like Cracker Barrel 1/3 Less Fat, Jarlsberg Lite, Cabot Light, or Borden Low-Fat American.
- Look for "light" mozzarella, which has half the fat of regular. "Part skim" mozzarella only saves one gram of sat fat per ounce.

2 Switch from ground beef to veggieburgers, chicken breast, or ground turkey.

Why change?

Americans eat too much red meat. And cutting back isn't just important for your heart. Red meat is also linked to a higher risk of cancers of the colon and prostate.

Why single out ground beef? Because it's almost always fatty ... and we eat so much of it. Ground beef's popularity has surged in recent years because hamburgers are cheaper and quicker to cook than roasts or steaks. In fact, 40 percent of all the beef we consume is now ground. Yet it contributes more than 60 percent of the saturated fat that we get from beef.



Switch from a typical (quarter pound) burger to a veggie or ground turkey breast burger and you'll dodge more than a third of a day's saturated fat. And one less burger means one less potential source of *E. coli* bacteria.

How to do it

- Try a meatless Boca Burger or Gardenburger, a broiled marinated portobello mushroom or chicken breast on a crusty roll, or a ground turkey breast burger (scrumptious with the right recipe).
- For your meatloaf, meatballs, chili, spaghetti sauce, etc., try ground turkey breast or (meatless) Harvest Burgers for Recipes or Gimme Lean.
- At fast food restaurants, order a grilled chicken sandwich (hold the mayo) or a veggie or chicken wrap or pita. If you've gotta get a burger, order the smallest one on the menu.
- Don't be fooled by food labels that sound lean. A "quarter pound" burger made from ground beef that's labeled "80% lean" uses up a third of your day's saturated fat allowance. To be "low-fat" (no more than three grams of fat per serving), ground beef would have to be "97% lean." Good luck finding it.

3 Switch from butter or stick margarine to a lower-fat tub margarine.

Why change?

Because it's so easy. According to the manufacturers, about 65 percent of the margarine and butter used at home ends up on bread. What could be simpler than dipping your knife into a lower-fat tub margarine?

Margarine is a major source of fat -- and saturated fat -- in the average person's diet. Add in margarine's artery-clogging trans fat and the trouble is double.

For each tablespoon of lower-fat tub margarine you use instead of regular margarine, you save four grams of heart-damaging fat. Use it instead of butter and you save seven grams. That's a third of a day's limit in a couple of swipes of the butter knife.

How to do it

- Switch to a lower-fat tub like Smart Beat, Fleischmann's Lower Fat, or Promise Ultra. They're as creamy as any margarine your toast has laid crumbs on.
- If you're stuck on butter, make it a light whipped brand. You'll save seven grams of fat per tablespoon, four of them the artery-clogging kind.



- For cooking and baking, low-fat margarines may splatter or make your pie crust soggy because they contain more water. If you need a full-fat margarine, try Promise's new trans-free spread (stick or tub). Fleischmann's says it also plans to have one out soon.

4 Switch from high-fat hot dogs, sausage, ham, bacon, or bologna.

Why change?

Americans are pigging out. Processed meats like hot dogs, sausage, ham, and bacon are the second leading source of fats and the fourth leading source of saturated fat in the average American's diet. They're also the second biggest supplier of sodium.

A ham sandwich (with mayo) from a typical deli has 670 calories, more than half a day's fat (40 grams) and saturated fat (12 grams), and nearly a whole day's sodium (2,200 mg). A BLT is almost as bad.

In supermarkets, it's a snap to find lower-fat processed meats. If only restaurants would shop there.

How to do it

- Buy low-fat or fat-free bologna and hot dogs made by Healthy Choice, Oscar Mayer, Hormel and others.
- Try Louis Rich or Oscar Mayer turkey bacon or low-fat ham.
- Try low-fat sausage made by Healthy Choice and others.



5 Switch from whole or 2% milk to 1% (low-fat) or skim (fat-free).

Why change?

Milk adds a significant amount of saturated fat and cholesterol to the average person's diet. One-percent (low-fat) and skim (fat-free) milk aren't to blame.

Whole (3.3% fat) and 2% (now called "reduced-fat") make up 75 percent of the milk we consume. Each glass of skim that you drink instead of whole milk saves five grams of sat fat—a quarter of a day's worth. Switch from a glass of whole to 1%—or from 2% to skim—and you save three grams of sat fat. With a daily limit of 20 grams, that's not trivial.



How to do it

- Just move your hands along the dairy case, from the whole or 2% milk to the 1% or skim.

- Close your eyes. When we had thousands of consumers put on sunglasses so they couldn't tell what kind of milk they were drinking, nine out of ten said that they liked the taste of either 1% or skim.

6 Limit foods with 480 mg of sodium or more per serving to one a day.

Why change?

Cutting sodium from 4,000 mg to 2,000 mg a day would lower average blood pressures by about two points, enough to save more than 10,000 lives a year from heart attacks and strokes.

Throwing away your salt shaker isn't the best way to do it. The lion's share -- some 75 percent -- of the sodium we consume comes from restaurant and processed foods like soups, pizza, frozen dinners, lunch meats, hot dogs, and ham.

At the supermarket, "Nutrition Facts" labels tell you how much of a day's sodium (the Daily Value) a serving contains. Limit foods with more than 480 mg (20 percent of the Daily Value) per serving to just one a day.



Unfortunately, restaurant foods are loaded with sodium and not loaded with labels. Even healthier restaurant meals-like a McDonald's Grilled Chicken Deluxe or a serving of spaghetti with tomato sauce-have more than 1,000 mg of sodium. And just about any Chinese or Mexican restaurant entree hits 2,000 mg.

How to do it

- Read labels. Look for foods with a little sodium as possible.
- Don't judge sodium by taste. At McDonald's, the french fries have less sodium than any of the sandwiches. Some "salty" foods, like potato chips, have no more sodium than breakfast cereals or bread.
- Buy "healthy" versions of salt-laden foods like soups, pasta sauces, and lunch meats. The word "healthy" can't appear on the label if the food contains more than 480 mg of sodium per serving.

7 Eat at least three servings of vegetables at dinner each night and two servings of fruit as snacks each day.

Why change?

Heart disease, stroke, blindness (caused by degeneration of the retina), cancers of the lung, colon, stomach, esophagus, mouth, throat, and possibly the bladder and cervix. How many reasons do you need?

Experts recommend four or five servings of vegetables and four or five servings of fruit a day. Yet the average American is stuck at about three vegetables—one of them white potatoes and a measly 12/3 fruits. (Amazingly, on any given day, half of all Americans eat no fruit at all.)

For many people, the easiest way to get enough is to have three servings of vegetables at dinner and squeeze in a couple of servings of fruits as snacks.

How to do it

- It's easy to reach your goal, because servings are small: half a cup of most vegetables, one cup of salad, and one piece of most fruit.
- Saute spinach, broccoli, etc., in a little oil and garlic.
- Steam or microwave Brussels sprouts, green beans, asparagus, or broccoli and coat with lemon juice, mustard, and a touch of oil.
- Saute sliced onion, peppers, and mushrooms. Serve it over pasta or stuff it in a flour tortilla, a toasted whole wheat pita, or a four-egg (one yolk) omelet.
- Bake a sweet potato 'til it's soft and caramelized inside.
- Keep handy bags of frozen fruit or vegetables in the freezer. Take fresh or dried fruit to work.
- Stick with whole fruit. juice isn't bad, but whole fruit has more fiber and fewer calories.



8 Eat at least three servings of whole grains each day.

Why change?

You get more fiber, vitamin E, vitamin B-6, magnesium, zinc, copper, manganese, and potassium in whole wheat than in refined "enriched" white flour. You may also get a lower risk of heart disease, diverticulosis, cancer, and diabetes.



What's more, the fiber in whole grains helps prevent constipation (no trivial matter in a nation that spends more than \$600 million a year on laxatives). Yet the average American still consumes just 12 grams of fiber a day -- far short of the 20 to 30 grams recommended by the National Cancer Institute.

Americans get more fiber from bread than from any other food. We could get even more. At most, 20 percent of the bread sold in the U.S. is whole grain.

How to do it

- A serving of bread is just one slice. So every sandwich gives you two.
- Buy whole wheat bread instead of white, wheat, multi-grain, bran, French, Italian, rye, or pumpernickel (they're mostly white flour). Second best are breads with whole wheat listed before any other flour.
- Try a whole grain breakfast cereal like shredded wheat, Grape-Nuts, Cheerios Wheaties, or Total. Most other cereals (corn flakes, Special K, Rice Krispies, and Product 19, for example) aren't whole grain.
- Try bran cereals like raisin bran, All-Bran, or 100% Bran. Technically, they're not whole grain, but they supply the part of the grain we often lose. Most bran breads have too little bran to matter.
- Try hot cereals like oatmeal, Wheatena, Ralston, or Roman Meal.
- Try whole grain crackers like Triscuits or Finn Crisps.
- Experiment with whole wheat pasta or couscous, kasha or brown rice.

9 Eat at least four servings of beans, lentils, or peas each week.

Why change?



Like other vegetables, beans, lentils, and peas have fiber and phytochemicals that may cut the risk of cancer, heart disease, diverticulosis, diabetes, and constipation.

But unlike other vegetables beans, lentils, and peas can step in for meat, poultry, eggs, or other protein foods. Meat, etc., can raise the risk of heart disease and possibly cancer.

The average American eats less than one cup of beans a week. It's easy -- and a break from the old standbys -- to double that to at least four half-cup servings.

How to do it

- Try bean dips with low-fat tortilla chips.
- Add canned (rinsed) garbanzo beans to your salad.
- Try lentil, split pea, or bean soup (plus a roll and salad) for lunch.
- Heat some drained, rinsed black beans and serve over rice, with salsa on top.
- Try Middle Eastern hummus (made of chickpeas) on a sandwich or as a dip, Indian dal (made of split peas or lentils) as a side dish, or Mexican bean burritos.

10 Switch from soft drinks to seltzer, orange juice, or skim milk.

Why Change?

In 1976, soft drinks passed milk to become the most popular beverage in America.' They haven't looked back.

The average American now consumes more than 50 gallons of soda a year. That's nearly double the beer, more than double the milk or coffee, and six times the fruit juice and tea we drink.

To make matters worse, more than 75 percent of the soda we chug is the empty-calorie, heavily sweetened, non-diet variety. Each 12-ounce can of regular soda has about ten teaspoons of sugar, 160 calories ... and nothing else.

Instead of low-fat milk that can help prevent osteoporosis, or fruit juice that may help prevent cancer, the average American blows 180 calories a day on "liquid candy."

How to do it

- If you want to cut calories, drink flavored (or regular) seltzer or sparkling water. Diet soft drinks are also low-cal, but uncertainty about the safety of artificial sweeteners may spoil their flavor.
- If you have calories to spare, drink fruit juice. Orange leads the pack, with vitamin C folic acid, potassium, magnesium, and vitamin B-1. Grapefruit is a good second, while the omnipresent grape and apple belong at the bottom of the nutritional barrel.
- Make your own healthy soft drink. Mix OJ and seltzer half and half.

